“The Right to the City

“The Right to the City,” pp. 3-25Overview: Harvey examines the recent historical and economic processes that have formed cities and suburbs into the unequal places that they are. Admittedly, it is a difficult reading because Harvey draws heavily on the theory of capitalism, which we discussed earlier in the semester. My recommendation is to not rush the reading and to reference the definitions below as you proceed. Write down unfamiliar terms and ideas so that we can discuss them in class. Key words: accumulation: increase in wealth from capitalist investments capital: money and investments capitalism: the dominant political economic system in which wealthy capitalists own the means of production and the working class majority sells their labor creative destruction: urban transformation that destroys impoverished neighborhoods of the city by dispossessing people of their homes, livelihoods, and cultures to make way for new developments for the wealthy elite; ‘gentrification’ is one example of creative destruction surplus / surplus value: profit generated from economic exchanges in capitalist system urbanization: the process of making urban areas or cities (note: suburban areas are very much part of urbanization and are shaped by similar processes!)1. D. Harvey writes: “The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change and reinvent the city more after our heart’s desire.” (p. 3) and “To claim the right to the city in the sense I mean it here is to claim some kind of shaping power over the processes of urbanization, over the ways in which our cities are made remade, and to do so in a fundamental and radical way.” (p. 4) discuss the importance of the idea of an individual vs. a collective right to the city. Why does Harvey make this distinction? Who typically controls urbanization? Why? What is their goal or purpose in doing so? In what ways does urbanization and capitalism alter the natural environment?\*Skip page 7 & most of page 8 (until “Fast-forward…”)\*2. In what ways did Robert Moses—through his city and suburban planning--radically alter NYC beginning in the 1940s?-What were the social and environmental impacts of Robert Moses’s interventions? (Hint: consider impacts on working class populations, racial & ethnic dynamics)3. Harvey writes “We increasingly live in divided, fragmented, and conflict-prone cities” (pp. 14-15). In what ways do you see class divisions and fragmentation in the community where you live?-In what ways might these divisions impact your health and your community’s health either positively or negatively? 4. On pages 22-25, Harvey makes his argument for the majority to claim their right to the city. What, exactly, should the majority demand?-From whom should the majority demand their right to the city?-Why should they demand their right to the city and what is to be gained?-How does Harvey suggest people go about doing this?“ Ghetto Miasma: Enough to Make you Sick”5. What is the “miasma” afflicting New Yorkers?6. In what ways are poor health outcomes discussed in the article, including asthma, heart disease, and cancers, linked to urban environmental exposures?7. In what ways are conditions of urban environments discussed in the article tied to D. Harvey’s “The Right to the City” in Rebel Cities